



LEGISLATIVE Pay Daze

CSG National Study Finds Legislators' Salaries Lag Inflation

A new CSG study has found legislative salaries haven't kept up with inflation. The salaries for lawmakers are influenced by type of legislature, frequency of sessions and the regions in which legislators serve.

By Jack Penchoff

New Hampshire and California sit on opposite coasts. They also sit on opposite sides of the legislative pay scale. New Hampshire's lawmakers are the lowest paid in the nation at \$100 per year. Legislators in California, however, are the highest paid in the 50 state capitols with annual salaries of \$110,880.

Yet, lawmakers in both states share something in common with their brethren in the other 48 states—their pay has not kept pace with inflation nor the average salary increases among the general population.

Those are some of the findings in a new publication from The Council of State Governments, *State Legislator Compensation: A Trend Analysis*.

Dr. Keon Chi, editor-in-chief of CSG's annual *Book of the States*, wrote the 38 page report. Using data compiled from *Book of the States* over the past 30 years, Chi and his staff took a comprehensive look at state legislative compensation and the various factors that influence salaries for state lawmakers.

"To my knowledge, this is the first longitudinal analysis that focuses on legislative salaries broken down by types, frequency of sessions and regions," Chi said.

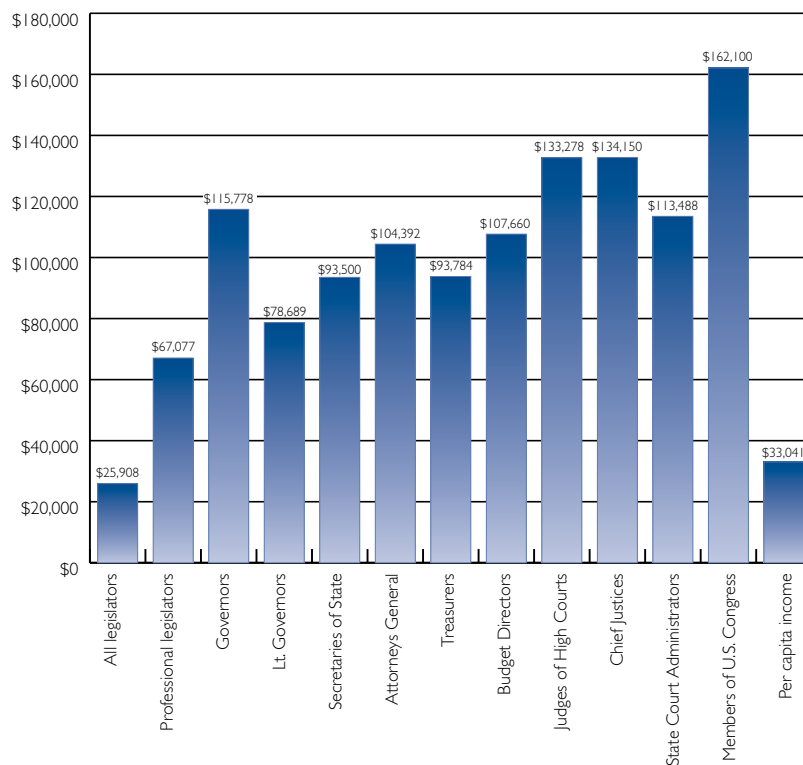
Salaries Decline

Chi's trends analysis shows that since 1975, when adjusted for current dollars, legislators' pay in the majority of states—28—has actually declined. In 22 states, salaries over that same 30-year period increased.

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—Dr. Keon Chi

2005 Salary Comparison: Legislative, Executive and Judicial Branches



But even in states where salaries increased, pay did not keep up with inflation.

Between 1975 and 2005, per capita income in the 50 states increased 50.62 percent.

Meanwhile during that same period, annual salaries for legislators declined nearly 7 percent when adjusted for inflation.

In New York, for example, where the legislature is full-time, the annual legislative salary declined 8.63 percent between 1975 and 2005. Meanwhile, per capita income for residents of the Empire State rose 56.92 percent.

Even in some states where legislators’ salaries increased in current dollars, gains were much smaller than per capita income in the state.

An example is Massachusetts. Legislative pay for legislators increased 18.29 percent since 1975 when adjusted for inflation. Meanwhile, per capita income in the Bay State increased 85.19 percent when adjusted for inflation over the 30 years included in the report.

Although California’s legislators are the highest paid, their inflation adjusted salary increased between 1975 and 2005 by 41.79 percent, about the same increase in per capita income for all residents, 40.41 percent.

Pay influences the interest level of potential candidates for legislative offices, said Chi.

“Even in California and other states with higher pay, compensation levels have an impact on recruitment, retention and the work of the legislature,” said Chi. “If legislators are not paid adequately, then candidates are drawn from a smaller pool. High

pay broadens that pool. You can’t expect to attract good candidates with pay that is lower when compared to other jobs and professions.”

Types of Legislatures

Among the factors that impact legislative compensation, according to the report, is the type of legislative body—professional, citizen or a hybrid of the two.

Professional legislatures are generally comprised of full-time legislators who have no legal limits on the length of their regular sessions. The nine states with professional legislatures also are the nine highest paid—California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

In 2005, the average salary in professional legislatures was \$67,077.22. That’s a 5.13 percent increase for those states since 1975. In four of those states—Illinois, New York, Ohio and Wisconsin—salaries during that period declined when adjusted for inflation.

Citizen legislatures are the lowest paid. Citizen legislators generally hold full- or part-time jobs outside the legislature and spend less time on legislative work. In 2005, legislators in those 18 states earned an average salary of \$9,158, which was 12.4 percent lower than the average for those 18 states 30 years earlier.

Hybrid legislatures possess some of the characteristics of professional and citizen legislatures. In 2005, legislators in those 23 states earned an average of \$22,907, a 16.22 percent decline in pay when adjusted for inflation.

Professional Legislator Annual Salaries by State: 1975–2005* (CPI adjusted)

State	1975	1985	1995	2005	Percent change (%) 1975–2005
Professional					
California	\$78,198.91	\$62,437.93	\$94,109.76	\$110,880.00	41.79%
Illinois	74,052.00	60,157.50	55,243.74	57,619.00	-22.19
Massachusetts	46,978.59	55,530.00	60,661.58	55,569.39	18.29
Michigan	70,349.40	67,598.52	64,249.52	79,650.00	13.22
New Jersey	37,026.00	46,275.00	45,747.80	49,000.00	32.34
New York	87,011.10	79,593.00	75,157.10	79,500.00	-8.63
Ohio	64,795.50	58,600.81	55,454.18	56,260.62	-13.17
Pennsylvania	57,760.56	64,785.00	61,432.76	69,647.00	20.58
Wisconsin	58,049.36	50,350.90	49,742.24	45,569.00	-21.50
Average					
w/o CA (a)	63,802.38	60,592.07	62,422.07	67,077.22	5.13
	62,002.81	60,361.34	58,461.11	61,601.88	-0.65
Median					
w/o CA (a)	64,795.50	60,157.50	60,661.58	57,619.00	-11.08
	61,422.43	59,379.15	58,057.88	56,939.81	-7.30

Regions

The report includes regional information. Tables in the report show that in 2005 legislators in the Eastern Region were the highest paid. At \$35,833, their salaries were nearly double the average legislators in the South are paid. Three states in the East, however, had an inflation-adjusted net decrease in pay between 1975 and 2005. Those were Maine, New Hampshire and New York.

In the Midwest, average salaries in 2005 were \$30,442.82, a 14.14 percent decline from 1975 when adjusted for inflation. That decline is reflected in the fact that there were no increases in eight of the 11 Midwest state legislatures between 1975 and 2005 when pay is adjusted for inflation.

In the South, basic compensation for lawmakers between 1975 and 2005 declined in 11 of the 16 states. In Alabama and Texas, there was no change in legislative salaries between 1975 and 2005, resulting in a 73 percent decline when adjusted for inflation. The five states with increases, when adjusted for inflation, were Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri and Oklahoma. Southern lawmakers earned an average of \$17,957 in 2005. Overall, Southern legislatures' average pay declined 29.23 percent between 1975 and 2005 when adjusted for inflation.

In the West, legislators' average salary in 2005 was \$24,222. However, remove California's salary figures and the rest of the West averaged only \$17,000, below that of the South.

While average legislative pay in the West increased an inflation adjusted 8.98 percent between 1975 and 2005, the average pay for Western legislators actually declined 3.2 percent when California's figures are not used.

Other Compensation

The report includes tables and charts on other forms of leg-

islative compensation, including expense allowances, per diems and retirement benefits.

"Some states are generous with their per diem expenses allowances, therefore salaries are not the only indicator of total compensation," Chi said. "Expenses, retirement and health care benefits are highlighted in the report."

Chi also uses data to compare legislative salaries with those of other elected and judicial officials. While acknowledging that most state legislators are part time, he uses for his comparison the averages of the nine professional legislatures. State high court justices, for example, earn a national average of \$133,278, nearly double the salaries of the average lawmaker in professional legislatures.

Executive branch offices included for comparison, and all higher with higher salaries than legislators, are governors, lieutenant governors, secretaries of state, attorneys general, treasurers, budget directors and state court administrators.

—Jack Penchoff is CSG associate director of communications and senior editor of *State News* magazine.

State Legislator Compensation: A Trend Analysis is available through CSG for \$45. CSG members receive a 20 percent discount. For a copy, call 800-800-1910.